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Shaping an inclusive digital future

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The digital revolution, now accelerated by rapid advances in artificial intelligence, is transforming countries around the world. However, this transformation presents a dual reality. On the one hand, AI's potential can enhance public service delivery, drive economic growth and create new opportunities for innovation and employment. On the other hand, AI development can exacerbate existing inequalities. The digital divide, characterised by unequal access to technology and internet connectivity, risks leaving behind communities and countries unable to keep pace with rapid advances. AI and digital technologies – such as online learning platforms, telemedicine and remote-work opportunities – can extend access of previously unattainable resources to neglected communities. But they can also deepen disparities, particularly for those lacking the necessary digital infrastructure to leverage these benefits. The risks of AI are not confined to blue-collar jobs such as manufacturing. Advanced technologies

The impact of digitalisation and AI technologies is unprecedented, but global governance needs to keep pace if we are to avoid worrying trends in their usage

such as large-language models have already started affecting professions traditionally considered secure. LLMs can draft legal documents and even generate financial reports with a high degree of accuracy, which has an impact on white-collar fields. The dual reality of AI highlights the need for inclusive governance and policies. Establishing the appropriate regulatory frameworks is essential to maximise the transformative potential of AI while minimising its drawbacks.

THE RISK OF REGULATORY DISPARITIES

Although national and international bodies have begun implementing regulations to govern AI development and use, much remains to be done. The European Union's AI Act is a commendable effort to create a legal framework ensuring that AI systems are safe and respect fundamental rights. Similarly, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's proposed global framework of standards for ethical AI use represents a positive step towards global governance. However, despite these efforts, AI governance at the global level ultimately remains relatively fragmented and inconsistent. Some countries have robust regulatory frameworks that safeguard accountability and transparency in AI systems; others lack such regulatory mechanisms. This 'regulatory disparity' risks creating environments

where exploitative practices can thrive, leading to unequal distribution of AI's benefits that will disrupt overall governance. Regions with stronger and more robust regulation enjoy higher standards of protection and more opportunities, while less regulated areas – often in the Global South – risk being exploited.

THE ROLE OF THE G20

The G20, as a platform for international economic cooperation, is uniquely positioned to drive global AI governance. To do so effectively, G20 governments must first recognise that AI adoption and the broader digitalisation process involves three key stages: access, integration and operation. The first stage, access, is about establishing the foundational digital infrastructure – including cell towers, power supply and

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data centres – necessary for AI services to become available. The second stage, integration, involves incorporating AI into various sectors through pilot projects, policy frameworks and workforce development. The last stage, operation, is about scaling AI applications and use across the whole of society while managing evolving governance and ethical considerations. Currently, multilateral discussions about AI regulations often revolve around the operational stage, reflecting the concerns of the Global North, whose policy objectives may differ significantly from those of the Global South.

G20 governments should advocate for collective action across all three stages.

“ AI adoption and the broader digitalisation process involves three key stages: access, integration and operation”

Establishing a dedicated fund to support AI infrastructure development in the Global South would be a crucial first step in enhancing access to AI technologies and services. The second step involves fostering meaningful partnerships between developed and developing countries to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaborative innovation, ultimately building a well-rounded global AI workforce. Success in the first two stages of access and integration would lay the groundwork for harmonising policies and regulations across jurisdictions, preventing the emergence of fragmented regulatory ecosystems. Capacity-building initiatives led by the G20 to leverage AI for societal good would not only promote equitable access and opportunities within developing countries but also help address domestic disparities in developed ones.

Only when countries and communities have equitable access to the opportunities afforded by AI can meaningful progress be made in ensuring that the third stage – the operation of AI – remains ethical, inclusive and beneficial for the whole of society. Ultimately, the true measure of AI's success will not be in its technological prowess but in its power to deliver for a unified, equitable global community. 